

Mandu, Indore (Brosset 1962, BNHS collections); Vijaynagar, Bellary (Brosset 1962, Wroughton and Ryley 1913b) and Chandrapur district in Maharashtra (Bhiwagade 1978).

Brosset (1962) in his paper on bats of central and western India mentions that there is no record of this species from Gujarat and Maharashtra. However, Bhiwagade collected six female bats of the same species from Chandrapur district, Maharashtra, in 1978. There is no further record of this species from any other parts of Maharashtra. This is hence the first record of the

Leaf-nosed bat, *H. lankadiva* from Sangameshwar, Ratnagiri district, Maharashtra State.

July 15, 1993

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5. WILD BUFFALO *BUBALUS BUBALIS* IN DHAKUAKHANA, LAKHIMPUR DISTRICT OF ASSAM

Dhakuakhana Sub-division of Lakhimpur district in eastern Assam is entirely on the flood-plain zone of the Brahmaputra and its tributary, the Subansiri. The original natural vegetation comprised mostly of tall elephant-grass and patches of marshes and woodland here and there — favoured habitat for the rare Asiatic Wild Water Buffalo (*Bubalus bubalis*). However, the bulk of the woodlands have vanished while the grassland is extant as patches only.

During my stay at Dhakuakhana from November 1989 and April 1991, I made a detailed survey of the whole sub-division and found that the buffalo has vanished from the whole area except one.

On 24 October 1990 a villager of Dakhingaon-Keseruguri reported that four wild buffaloes were in the grassland lying to the west of Lamugaon and south of his village. On the basis

of this report I made a thorough survey of the area on elephant-back. We located footprints near Alotiagora village and then following track amidst dense elephant-grass found four buffaloes (date : 26 October, 1990). One large adult female (pregnant), one more adult female, one sub-adult male and one sub-adult female comprised the herd. The bull of the herd, which had one horn was killed sometimes in 1988 near Sariahni village by the Mising tribe. This is the last herd and also the remnant of the wild buffalo population in the whole sub-division. The herd size is now five with the large cow delivering a calf during the winter of 1990-91.

The buffaloes of this area used to move upto Kadam RF on the west bank of the Subansiri river. But now the movement has almost ceased. The wild ones reportedly visit their domestic cousins in the nearby villages during night. How-

ever, during the survey I noticed that they maintain a distance from the domestic stock. While the domestic buffaloes were seen grazing in the peripheral areas, the wild ones restricted themselves to the thick and impenetrable elephant-grass jungle.

The wild buffalo was well distributed throughout Dhakuakhana. The main reasons for decline were:

i) alteration of habitat for cultivation, mainly winter crops; (ii) hunting by the Mising (formerly plains Miri) tribe for food; and iii) attack by rinderpest in mid-1970s.

Before the rinderpest, an estimated 100-150 buffaloes were in the present area which extended upto Basudeo Than, Lesera and the proposed Bordoloni Sanctuary. It vanished from the Bordoloni area in the early eighties. One more buffalo habitat was available along the banks of the Brahmaputra river. The *chapories* (sandy islets and tracts) with tall grass provided ideal home for some scattered herds, which were sometimes augmented by arrivals from Majuli (Jorhat) and Dibrugarh areas. The last wild buffalo of the *chapories* was killed by the local Misings in 1984

at Bahir Bogori, near Tekeliphuta. It was a fine specimen (male) and its horn is now in my collection. The only other area where the buffalo is rarely met with, even today is the banks of the Subansiri river near Bebejia. Here the stragglers come from Kadam RF.

The future of the wild buffalo in Dhakuakhana is bleak. With only five animals surviving, that too in an area surrounded by villages and domestic stock, it is only a matter of time to declare it as 'locally extinct'. However, I submitted a proposal to the Government with clearance from the local administration, for a small sanctuary, namely the Borkalia Wildlife Sanctuary (4.6 sq. km) which will help this remnant buffalo population to recover for the time being and will also protect some wintering water fowls.

My thanks go to Padma Dihingia and Lankeswar Pegu for their help during the survey.

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6. SIGHTING OF CHRISTMAS ISLAND FRIGATE BIRD (*FREGATA ANDREWSI* MATHEWS) IN THE ANDAMANS

On 13/11/89 an unusual bird with long wingspan and forked tail was seen at 14-30 hrs., soaring initially low and later going very high in increasing circles, at Rangat Bay jetty, in Middle Andaman (approximately 12° 30' N and 93° E). Immediately a photograph was taken (200 mm, Nikon) for confirming the bird later on, along with a sketch and notes on special features. The bird was identified with the help of description and pictures given in the book "SEA BIRDS—AN IDENTIFICATION GUIDE" by Peter Harrison, as a juvenile of Christmas Island Frigate bird (*Fregata andrewsi*). This bird is restricted to Christmas Island (Indian Ocean) south of Java c. 11° S. No previous authentic record has been made from Indian waters, as stated by Salim Ali and Ripley in their book HANDBOOK OF THE BIRDS OF INDIA AND

PAKISTAN (1983).

The juvenile of Christmas Island Frigate bird differs from first stage juvenile of Lesser Frigate bird in white belly and broader breast band; while its differentiation from juvenile Great Frigate bird is more difficult, but that species lacks white on axillaries.

This record was made soon after a severe cyclonic storm hit Middle Andamans in the early morning of 6th Nov. 1989, indicating this vagrant was carried by the cyclonic winds to the east coast of Andamans.

December 16, 1991 AJAI SAXENA
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